Whistle in the Night

The Story of

Illinois Central

MAIN LINE OF MID-AMERICA

Whistle in the Night

We've all heard it. A friendly sound, speaking of far-away farms and factories, of friends and relatives in distant places. It also speaks for a train crew working through the night, hurrying products from farms and mines and factories, bringing your local merchants fresh beef and baby shoes, fashions with the new look, fresh fruits and seafoods. Whenever the people along the Illinois Central hear a whistle in the night, they know that it's a signal that men are working around the clock along 6,500 miles of railroad to bring all the world to their doors.

From Prairies to Bayous

Every morning, one of the nation's finest streamliners—the brown and orange "City of New Orleans"—leaves the Illinois Central Station in Chicago. This beautiful Dayliner moves southward through the maze of tracks and switches that mark Chicago as the railroad capital of the world. The steel mills and factories are left behind and the "City of New Orleans" picks up speed over level prairie lands. The fertile soil supports some of the most productive farms in the country. The Illinois Central Main Line goes through the small western tip of Kentucky and the Dayliner is soon in Tennessee. South of Memphis, cotton fields come into view through the wide windows. On through Mississippi the brown and orange train flashes past more cotton fields and fast growing southern pines. In Louisiana, the speeding wheels travel through the heart of the strawberry belt, skirt the shores of Lake Ponchartrain and come to a smooth stop in Union Station, New Orleans.

In 15 hours and 55 minutes we have traveled over the 921-mile "Main Line of Mid-America" from Chicago and the prairies of Illinois to New Orleans and the bayous of Louisiana. All along the Main Line, agriculture, mining and industry are producing and growing. What we have seen is taken for granted today, but the story of the Illinois Central goes back to the time when the Mississippi River was the frontier of the United States. How the nation's greatest north and south railroad (and a great western line as well) was built, is told briefly in the next few pages. It is a story of struggle, failure, and, of course, success in the development of the "Main Line of Mid-America," the shortest, most direct route between the great industrial and commercial area of Chicago and the thriving city of New Orleans, the nation's second port.

1818 TO 1837

In 1818, the Mississippi River was the frontier of the nation, and in that year, Illinois was admitted to the Union. The population was 40,000, most of it concentrated in the southern part of the state near the banks of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Here was a state of level prairie land, ideal for farming—rich and fertile, with none of the rocks and forests that made hard going for Eastern farmers. Hills in the northwest corner of the state held generous lead deposits and the southern part was underlaid with untouched veins of coal. Why was all this wealth unclaimed? One essential was lacking — transportation. The few muddy, rutted wagon trails, passable only during the summer, were completely inadequate. Canals were recommended at first, but a few more far-sighted citizens urged the use of steam locomotives. They were being tried out in Baltimore, Charleston and New Orleans and news of these experiments had reached Illinois. The issue became a political football and was bounced back and forth in the state legislature.

In the meantime, the Eastern railroads had developed, and the iron horse proved its superiority over the canals. With this encouragement, the legislature, having satisfied those who wanted a canal, passed another railroad bill creating the "Illinois Central Railroad Company." One of the supporters of the bill was Abraham Lincoln, then a representative in the Illinois legislature.

1837 TO 1850

To meet the demand for railroad service from many communities, the legislature passed the Internal Improvement Act of 1837. It called for a network of 1,341 miles of state-owned railroads, costing 20 million dollars —a staggering amount for such a sparsely populated state. A year later the first smoking monster rolled over the rails in Illinois. The Rogers, as it was named, was a midget with an unexplainable source of power. This locomotive was built in Paterson, New Jersey. Shipping it West was a problem — rails from the East had not yet reached Illinois. The Rogers took to the sea for a round-about voyage to New Orleans. From there it went by river boat up the Mississippi to Meredosia, Illinois. The first trip on its own rails was made in November, 1838 from Meredosia, half way to Jacksonville, Illinois.

In 1840 the route was extended to Jacksonville. The Rogers continued to rattle over the 24-mile track, and, in 1842, sufficient money was raised to

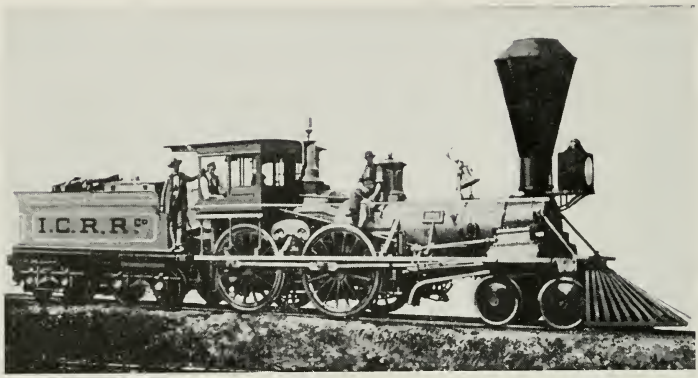
Building a railroad across the Illinois prairies was a matter of muscle and manpower in the early days.

extend the tracks to Springfield. The Rogers frequently left the rails and turned over in the ditch. Finally, after a series of these mishaps, the Rogers was sold and her chugging noise replaced by the crack of a mule skinner's whip.

1850 TO 1873

The Federal government desired a railroad in Illinois to open up its 11 million acres of public land. This land had been offered for sale at $2.50 an acre and then reduced to $1.25. Even at that price no one would buy. Stephen A. Douglas, aided by Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun and Jefferson Davis, introduced a railroad bill in Congress. It was passed in 1850, authorizing a grant of public lands to Illinois for the construction of a railroad. The purpose of the bill was to aid the settlement of Illinois and speed the sale of government lands so that they could be converted into taxable lands. This time, Illinois was not so enthusiastic. The collapse of the 1837 railroad venture was kept fresh in the minds of the legislators by a 17 million dollar debt, 3 million of which was overdue. The solution was to let private capital assume the risk, but the legislature soon found that there was not enough private capital in Illinois. The charter was awarded to business leaders from New York and New England. It took effect February 10, 1851, authorizing a railroad from Cairo, in the southern tip of the state, to East Dubuque in the northwest corner. A branch line was to extend from Centralia, north to Chicago for a total distance, including both lines, of 705 miles, more than twice the distance of any other railroad then existing.

The Illinois Central was the first land grant railroad. The Federal Government held



Old No. 1, the woodburner that opened service on the Illinois Central.

9/10ths of the land in Illinois and of this, 2½ million acres were turned over to the Illinois Central to aid in financing the railroad.

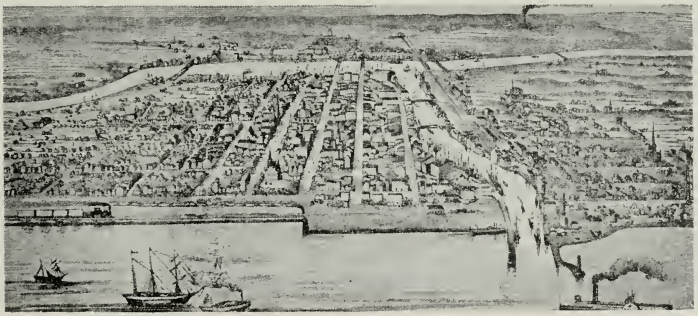
There were no mechanized aids to construction in 1851, tracks had to be laid across wild prairie country with very few towns along the way to supply the workmen. Labor was recruited from all parts of the United States, and one contractor brought 1,000 men from Ireland. During the 5 years that the railroad was under construction, at least 100,000 men were brought to Illinois to help in laying the rail. Hundreds of horse and ox teams were used to transport supplies and equipment. Lumber for cross-ties and bridge timbers was brought from Michigan and Wisconsin. Iron rails were not manufactured in the United States; they had to be imported from England. One sailing ship sank in mid-Atlantic with a load of rails for the Illinois Central. In spite of all the difficulties, the railroad was finished before the time specified in the charter.

For the entrance into Chicago, the Illinois Central requested a route along the south branch of the Chicago River. Lake Michigan had been eating away the shoreline south of Randolph Street and a severe storm caused further damage while the railroad and the city were negotiating. Chicago's population was only 30,000, and the city could not afford to maintain its shoreline. The City Council gave the Illinois Central a lake front entrance, instead of the route it had requested, and required the railroad to build a breakwater and assume all further expenses required to protect the shoreline.

Even before the construction was completed, the government sold its land for double the for-

mer price. Then, as agreed in the charter, the Illinois Central was allowed to sell its own land to help finance the construction costs. A huge advertising campaign was launched, the first large scale advertising by any railroad. It was printed in five languages and went to all parts of the United States, England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Sweden and Norway. The railroad used newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and handbills. Agents and lecturers were sent out to do personal selling. Illinois was described as the "Garden State of America" and long term credit was offered. The promise of fertile land and dependable, year-round transportation brought an immediate response. In 1850, only 14% of Illinois land was classified improved. By 1860, 67,000 new farms had been established and 37% of Illinois land was then in the improved classification. During that same 10 year period, the 32 counties served by the Illinois Central increased in population from 248,000 to 609,000 — an increase of 145%. All along the railway, vacant prairie land was converted into towns in a matter of months. A typical example was Centralia. In 1854, a station was built beside the tracks. When built, it was surrounded only by waving prairie grass. Within a few months it became a rapidly growing town of 1,900 people.

The government was pleased with the profits and the rapid sale of its land. After that, land grants were given to other railroads to encourage them to open up the West.



CHICAGO IN 1853—The Illinois Central originally entered the city on a trestle in the lake. This location was designed by the city council in order to relieve the city of the heavy expense of protecting the shore line against lake storms. The railroad built a breakwater at a cost to itself, and a saving to the city, of millions of dollars.

With the completion of the Illinois Central, coal mines began opening in southern Illinois. At that time all railroads in the state burned wood and experienced railroad men said that Illinois coal could not be burned in a locomotive. The Illinois Central experimented and proved that it

could. Within a few years, the Illinois Central became the best customer of the Illinois coal mines.

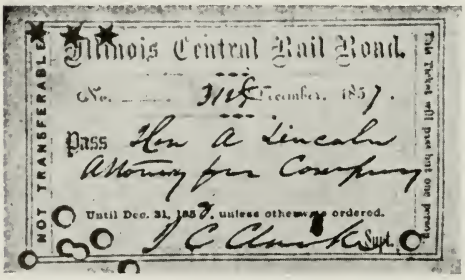
The first trains over the Illinois Central tracks became the streamlined "City of New Orleans" now makes this trip in only 5 hours and 43 minutes.

While the Illinois Central was being built, a New Orleans company was formed to build a rail-

1865—First train operating between Waterloo, Ia., and Albert Lea, Minn.

welcome friends of people along the route. The shrill whistle of the locomotive was a pleasing punctuation for the howling wind of the prairie; it meant an end to the isolation of the lonely, rolling country. The fastest passenger trains, in those early days, traveled from Chicago to Cairo in 24 hours or more. The road north from that city to connect with the Illinois Central at Cairo, Illinois. The Civil War interrupted this project, but later it was completed to East Cairo, across the Ohio River from Cairo.

One of the first attorneys for the Illinois Central was Abraham Lincoln. He represented the company in many cases from the early 1850's until he went to the White House in 1860. Probably the most important case of his legal career was the McLean County Tax Case. He asked for and received a fee of $5,000, a record amount at that time.



Abraham Lincoln's Illinois Central pass.

1873 TO 1947

The first addition to the original Illinois Central lines was a line from Dubuque, on the eastern border of Iowa, to Sioux City on the west. In 1877, a direct line from Chicago to Springfield was opened.

During the Civil War, most of the line that had been built north from New Orleans was destroyed. After the war, the famous Confederate General, Beauregard, directed the rebuilding of this line and the Illinois Central purchased it in 1883. Six years later the bridge over the Ohio River was completed, connecting Cairo to East Cairo. This gave the Illinois Central its 921-mile Main Line from Chicago to New Orleans. It was the first railroad under one management from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The next important addition to the System was the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad — another route between Memphis and New Orleans. By 1893, the Illinois Central had a total of 3,696 miles of track.

The story of Casey Jones originated in 1900. Since then it has been told in song and poem so many times that people have come to regard Casey as a mythical figure. He did exist though, as an Illinois Central engineer. The train that was wrecked while Casey was trying to make up lost time, was the Cannonball Express, one of the early fast freight trains pioneered by the Illinois Central.

Since 1900, more lines were added, and the Illinois Central System now totals 6,581 miles. In addition, the Illinois Central operates over certain lines of other railroads. An example of this is the fast, direct service from Chicago to Florida on the Illinois Central's "City of Miami," "Sunchaser" and "Seminole."

Most railroads were constructed to follow the movements of the pioneers from east to west. Because the Illinois Central is one of the few north and south lines, it has many connections with other railroads. In all, there are 500 connections with 150 railroads. In Chicago alone, the Illinois Central has connections with 22 other railroads.

Continued growth is shown by the following figures taken from the 1947 Annual Report of the Illinois Central Railroad: Employees — 40,700; steam locomotives — 1,250; diesel passenger locomotives—19; passenger cars — 1,157; freight cars — 49,585. Additional equipment for diesel-powered streamliners is on order and will be placed in service during 1948.

Suburban Service

The Chicago suburban service of the Illinois Central is worth

noting because it is considered to be one of the finest in the world.

The grandfather of Illinois Central suburban trains was one pulled by a small wood burning locomotive. The first trip, in 1856, covered the 6½-mile stretch between Randolph Street and Hyde Park. There were no passengers either way, but the little wood-burner faithfully continued to make 3 trips a day and business began to increase. By 1900, there were 218 trains daily, serving three suburbs. An electrification program was completed in 1926. 280 cars are operated in trains of 2, 4, 6 or 8 cars. In 1947, these trains carried well over 46 million passengers. Because of the cleanliness, speed and frequency of the all-electric service, Chicago has grown rapidly along the suburban lines of the Illinois Central.

The story of the Illinois Central is typical of the far-seeing vision of pioneer America. From the day, more than 100 years ago when the Illinois railroad project was first talked about in the Illinois legislature, and the state had only 40,000 inhabitants, the Illinois Central has grown into a 6,581-mile railroad —one of the world's great transportation systems. Today the Illinois Central serves 14 mid-American states with lines running north and south, east and west. Over these lines travel many of America's finest passenger trains and a vast number of fast freights. The Illinois Central also participates in the business and civic affairs of hundreds of communities along its lines, buying supplies, paying taxes, helping farmers and distributing payroll dollars to 40,700 Illinois Central workers.

Since the end of the war, the Illinois Central has added new and finer equipment and trains to its streamliner fleet, bringing increased comfort and more luxuries to passengers. Fast freight schedules have been stepped up to make them even faster. During 1947, Illinois Central representatives helped to locate 123 new industrial plants along the railroad. In these and in many other ways, the Illinois Central is constantly improving its service to Mid-America. By striving to set the pace for modern transportation, the Illinois Central intends to **earn** the continued friendship and patronage of all those who live along its lines.

How the
"Main Line"
Serves
Mid-America

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

All the World's Goods *at Your Doorstep*

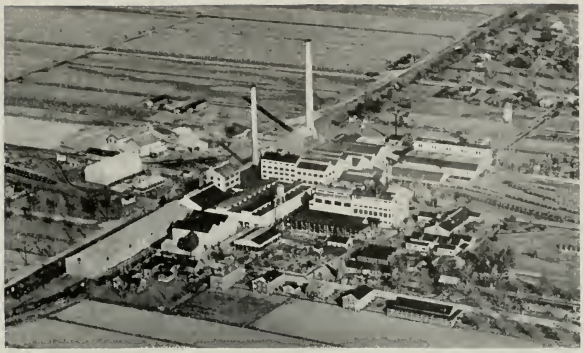
This is a new Illinois Central freight car. It carries automobiles or packaged merchandise with equal ease and efficiency. Last year the Illinois Central built 2,359 freight cars in its own shops and purchased 130 more. Altogether the Illinois Central owns nearly 50,000 freight cars of various kinds in order that it may serve the people of Mid-America efficiently and economically.

Fresh Fruits *the year-round*

Nowhere except in the United States do people enjoy a varied abundance of fresh fruits the year round, fruits brought from all points of the compass by railroad. Last year the Illinois Central hauled 52,250 cars of bananas and many thousands of cars of strawberries, grapes, melons, peaches, citrus fruits and apples.

Breakfast *Cereal,*
Beefsteak
and Butter

Most family dinner tables would be bare of many foods if the railroads stopped running. Just how bare is indicated by the fact that last year the Illinois Central alone carried 12 million tons of farm products, including eggs for breakfast, lamb chops for dinner and peanuts for the circus.

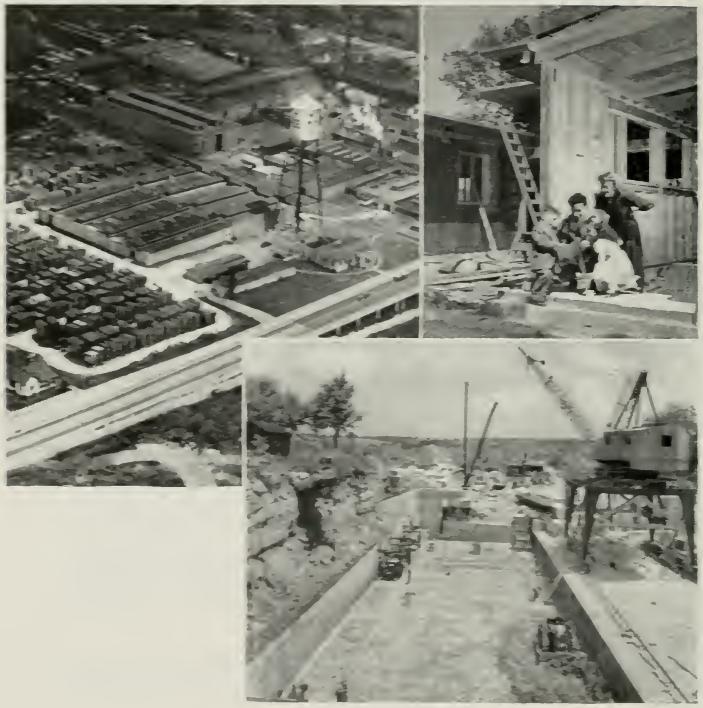


Sugar *from America's Sugarbowl*

...*and* Tobacco

In the heart of the Louisiana sugar lands, many of the nation's finest sugar-refineries are served by the Illinois Central, which last year handled more than 850,000 tons of sugar, enough to fill a good many million sugar bowls and make a sizable mountain of candy bars. . . . The Illinois Central also does lots of business with the tobacco people—important business to those who like cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco.

New Homes...



This year hundreds of thousands of new homes are going up all over the United States. And to help build them the Illinois Central will haul many millions of tons of lumber, cement, lime and plaster, brick, building tile, stone, glass and many other building materials.

...and Home Furnishings

Inside the new homes built this year will go many millions of dollars worth of furniture, rugs, draperies and all the other things that make America's homes the best in the world. Most of these things will travel by rail from plants like the one pictured above to your local merchants.

Fashions
and Footwear

Whenever you shop for clothing, whether it's for dresses, men's shirts, overalls or shoes, you buy things that have been brought to your community by rail. Cotton from the fields of the south is moved from gins to textile mills, to clothing manufacturers, to retail stores by the Illinois Central. And there is a similar journey behind the shoes you buy—cattle, hides, leather and finished footwear all travel by train.

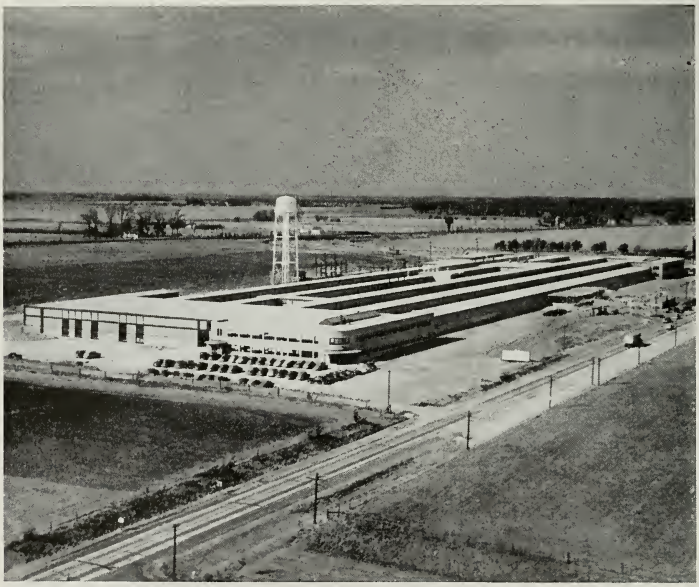
Coal *for Industry and Homes*

If any one product is most important to America's prosperity, that product is coal. Coal helps make tools for growing larger, better crops. Coal creates most of the power that multiplies the worker's productive capacity, enabling him to produce more, earn more and spend more. Coal energizes the production of American plenty. One third of all the freight tonnage hauled by the Illinois Central is coal.

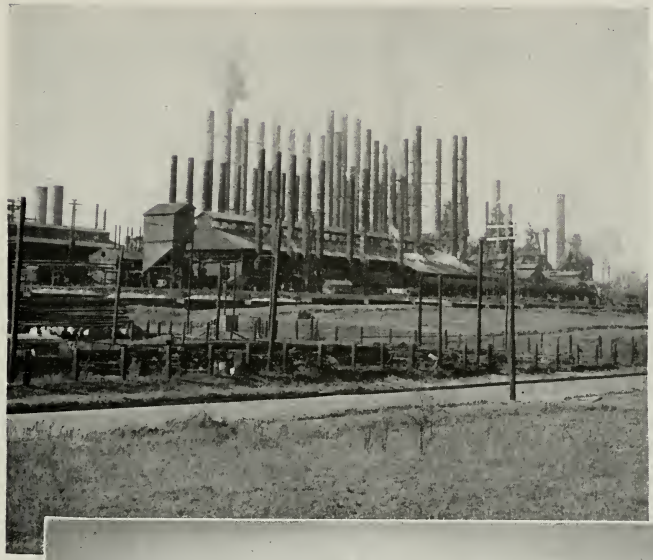
Automobiles. Tractors. **Farm** *Equipment*

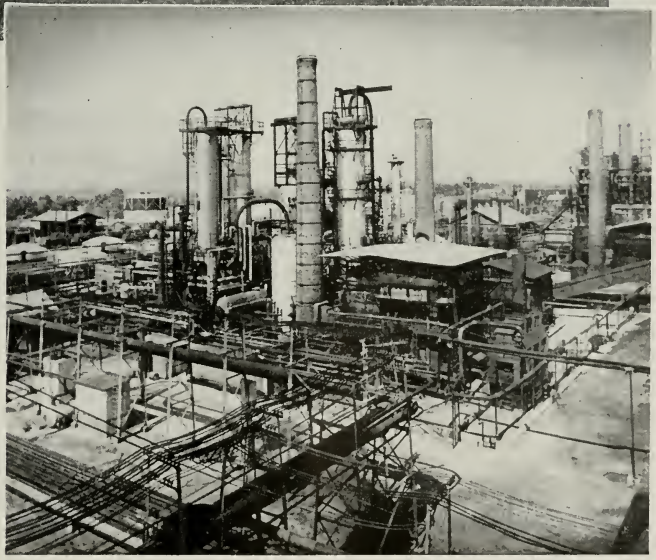
Even vehicles that furnish their own power for traveling highways and farm fields depend on the railroads for their existence. For the railroads haul the coal and steel that bring automobiles, tractors and farm equipment into being, and then deliver many of the finished products and parts, including tires.

Steel, Oil and Machines for Industry



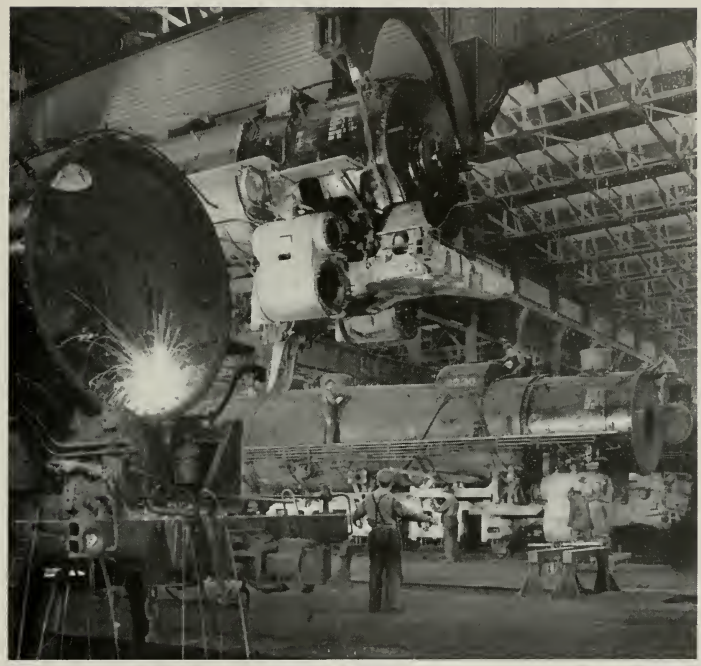
Heavy industry—steel, petroleum, manufacturing machinery and the like—depend on railroads like the Illinois Central to move both their raw materials and finished products. Freight of this kind hauled by the Illinois Central each year is measured in millions of tons.





Commerce *with* *Foreign Lands*

Because all the people of the United States benefit, directly or indirectly, from U. S. trade with other nations, the Illinois Central for years has conducted a campaign to increase trade between the area it serves and other countries. Last year an Illinois Central representative spent seven months in South America encouraging the development of trade through New Orleans, the nation's second port.



Keeping *the Trains Rolling*

Keeping the Illinois Central's equipment in first-class running order is a large and important job. Last year some 30 million dollars was spent on locomotive and car repairs. The total cost of maintaining equipment during the year was nearly 42 million dollars.

New Freight *Equipment*

One of the most important railroad needs is for more and better freight cars. The Illinois Central recently built the five aluminum hopper cars pictured above. It has also experimented with new-type refrigerator cars and purchased a number of lightweight Cor-Ten steel hopper cars. This year the railroad has on order 4,875 hopper cars, and 1,500 box cars are being constructed in the Illinois Central's own shops.

Passenger *Progress*

On May 17, 1936—more than 12 years ago—the diesel-powered streamliner "Green Diamond" set a record for fast service between Chicago and St. Louis. That was the beginning of the Illinois Central's modern passenger fleet, which now includes nine swift streamliners with another flashing new "Green Diamond" to come this year.

Speed *and* Safety
by Day and by Night

Illinois Central Streamliners

Panama Limited
City of New Orleans
City of Miami
The Daylight
Land O' Corn
Miss Lou

Coming soon:
A *new* Green Diamond

The Illinois Central today offers modern, streamlined passenger service between Chicago and New Orleans, Chicago and Florida, Chicago and St. Louis, Chicago and Waterloo, Ia., and between New Orleans and Jackson, Miss. The Illinois Central fleet includes the famous all-pullman overnight "Panama Limited" between Chicago and New Orleans; the record-breaking all-coach Dayliner "City of New Orleans" between the same cities, and the swift "City of Miami" between Chicago and Florida.

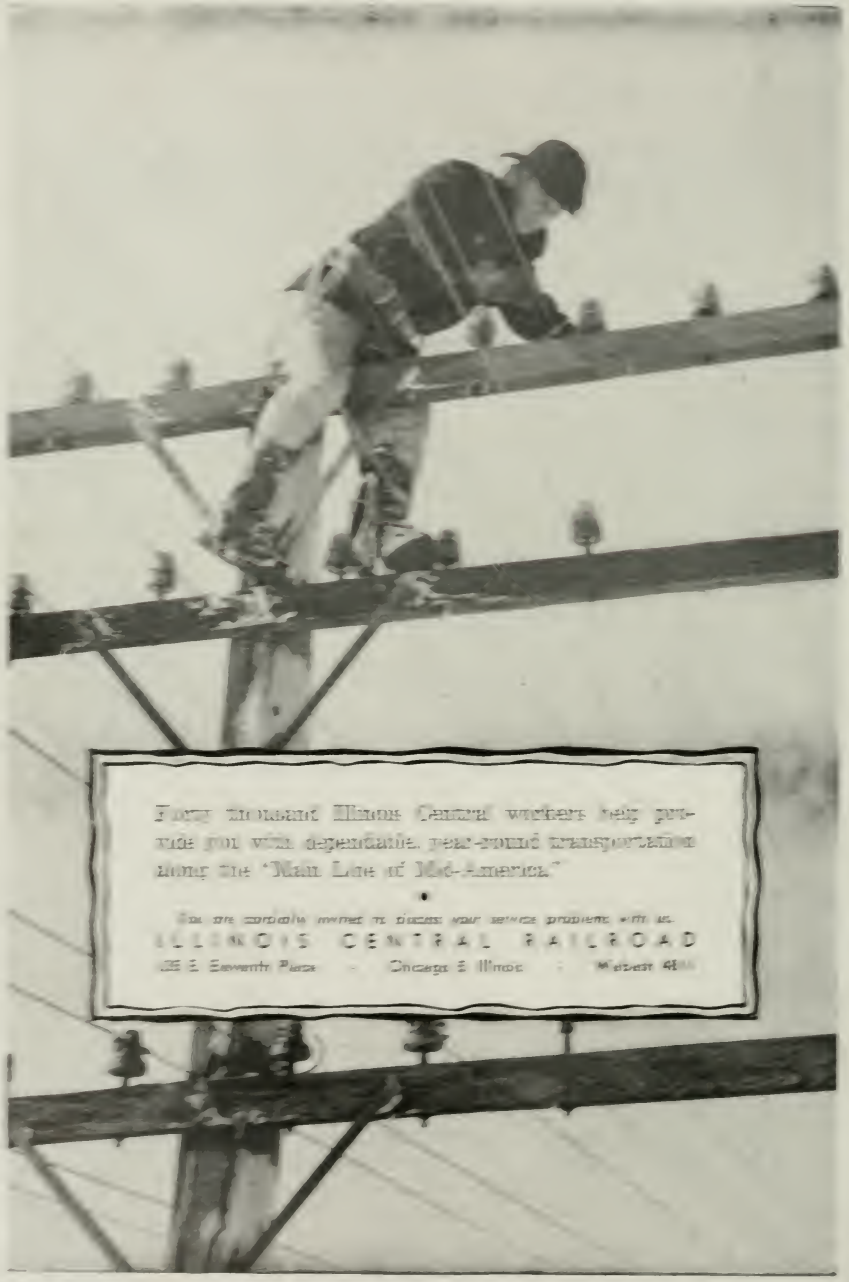
Luxurious accommodations and fine meals are a feature of all Illinois Central Streamliners.

46 Million
Suburban
Passengers

Many people who have visited other great cities of the world have been kind enough to rate the Illinois Central's suburban electric service with the world's best. This reputation is based upon quality of equipment, frequency of service, speed, comfort, safety and economy. The Illinois Central is now running 481 regular suburban trains on week days and 297 on Sundays.

The Foundation *of Good Railroading*

Under the wheels of your speeding train and along the right-of-way that rushes silently past your window, the Illinois Central spends some $100,000 every 24 hours for upkeep of rails and ties and signals, bridges and building and ballast, and many other items that stand still that the trains may move swiftly and safely.


Forty thousand Illinois Central workers help provide you with dependable, year-around transportation along the "Main Line of Mid-America."
You are cordially invited to discuss your service problems with us.
ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD
135 E. Eleventh Place - Chicago 5, Illinois - Midwest 4100